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ABSTRACT

An Australian study was conducted to develop a strategy for safe use of farm chemicals by Asian migrant market gardeners in Western Sydney. The researchers chose to use participatory approaches for which policy makers and development practitioners had in other studies shown enthusiasm, although this enthusiasm could not at times be sustained beyond the early stages of project planning due to nonparticipation of clients. Study results suggested that this nonparticipatory behavior had several causes: a cultural practice of avoiding outsiders, the different processes of sense making used by the gardeners and the researchers, and the researchers' professional illusions inherited from the intellectual bias of the practitioners, which inhibits their capacities to stimulate community participation. Inconsistencies between the social systems of the target community and of the practitioners were the foundations of a diversity that needed to be acknowledged. Conflicts in the research dealt with initial resistance displayed by growers against the researcher, putting off of the chemical usage issue because of inconsistency arising from sense-making processes, and growers' development of interest in addressing their issues. A theoretical framework useful for community development practitioners was designed that included accommodating diversity and building personal relationships. (Contains 19 references.) (YLB)

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Building Personal Relationships as a Catalyst for Community Participation: The case of ethnic market gardeners in Sydney basin*

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Abstract

Participatory approaches to community development have been proposed as an effective way of addressing the inadequacies experienced by some practitioners in achieving desired project outcomes. Client participatory approaches have been reported in many fields such as education, health, agricultural development and in corporate management. Both the democratic and more centrally organised political systems are strongly embracing the concept of participation but from different ideological perspectives.

Despite this apparent enthusiasm shown by policy makers and development practitioners to embrace participatory approaches, it is evident that on many occasions, this initial enthusiasm can not be sustained beyond the early stages of project planning due to 'non participation' by the 'clients'. This paper suggests that this 'non participatory' behaviour is largely related on the one hand to the community specific social dynamics and 'sense making' processes of communities and on the other hand to the objective entity dimension of projects and professional illusions inherited from the intellectual bias of the practitioner which inhibits their capacities to stimulate community participation. The prevalence of these inconsistencies between social systems, the social system of the target community and that of the practitioners, is the very foundations of diversity, and it needs to be acknowledged rather than attempting to bring about homogeneity. These aspects (diversity, objectivity, professional illusion and attempts to create homogeneity) encompass the development focus as well as participatory process. This paper discusses the value of developing personal relationships in community development and participation in marginalised communities of ethnic market gardeners in Western Sydney.

Introduction

Chemical use practices of market gardeners from ethnic migrant communities has been the focus of a study funded by Rural Industrial Research and Development Corporation (RIRDC). It was revealed from a previous study that a section of recently arrived migrants from Asian countries has chosen to do market gardening in Sydney basin and was developing a new line of production known as 'Asian vegetables.' Wide variety of Asian vegetables has been introduced by new migrants from Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos as the Chinese market gardeners has done for sometime. There was a substantial growth in this 'sub culture' in the dominant agricultural system in Australia in terms of production volume and number of people interested in growing. The growth was possible as there was a easily identifiable market niche created as result of increased Asian migrants since 1975. However, Australian agriculture industry is mainly dominated by food and fibre production in the broad acre farming systems where technology and entrepreneurial skill applications were given prominence. The government agencies and other organisations who had an interest in Australian agriculture adopted policies and provided services to match the needs of dominant agricultural systems leaving the 'new developments' at a back seat. In the absence of a proper appreciation and it's 'recognition' by the relevant authorities, the market gardening industry was not realising it's full economic and social potentials.

Aim of the RIRDC project was to develop a strategy for safe use of farm chemicals by ethnic market gardeners and the researchers opted to work *with* the growers towards this end by embracing participatory approaches. Equipped with an armory of participatory tools and a good number of theoretical maps the researchers commenced the journey with good intentions. It was a "thick forest" where no one has ventured before and we found it hard to enter as we were not welcomed.

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Theoretical maps were useful only to sustain our energy but participatory tools needed modification or to be replaced by new tools. From the very outset, we developed a sense of uneasiness in two fronts, one for having a planned objective and secondly in the area of community participation.

Finding the community was as mush a challenge as accessing them. Even after the initial contacts were made, market gardeners did not believe that there was either room or need for intervention by outsiders. On the contrary, researchers view was that 'there is a pressing need for improving their farming practices, particularly the farm chemicals usage'. Despite these conflicting views, during the course of the research, we were successful in developing grower participatory action to address the issues concerning growers, including the issue of 'chemical use'.

This was possible not through 'well planned strategies' or 'negotiated agreements appearing in participatory methodologies, but through developing relationships with the growers on the basis of new insights (learning) gained by the researchers. Essentially, this learning needs to be grounded in the social ecology of the community in order to achieve applied validity rather than limiting to abstract conceptualisation. The issues were identified by partly through shared meaning and partly through mutual respect. On the basis of this experience, the researchers suggest that "people participation" can be promoted by creating environments where personal relationships can grow. The initial requirement for this process lies in the intellectual and human capacities of the community developer/ researcher to learn and transform his/her own existing meaning perspective to harmonise with the meaning perspective of the community.

Research method.

Large amount of literature and course materials have been developed over the years around this topic. Most of it is centred around the traditional scientific inquiries and drawing from such materials, Willenden (1970)suggests that community research must under go through six stages as listed below.

* Select the area to be studied.
* Set the assumptions and hypothesis.
* Limit the terms of the study to scope of subject matter, geographic area and to the 'sample'.
* Gather data
* Classify, tabulate and analyse data.
* Data interpretation and presentation.

Undoubtedly, this represents the popular scientific model used by most of the Community Developers until recent times. It has been criticised for its paternalism, political ideology, ethical considerations, 'de-humanising' effect, and its validity. More importantly, it is an inquiring process where the researcher dissociates from the subject and it's sensibility which allows little or no room for engagement with the subject and thus outcome generated are de-contextualised from the subject's situation'. In spite of this inherent objectivity, until recent times scientific inquiry has been encouraged in the social science discipline and continues to gain considerable support.

Our position was that the scientific inquiry is inadequate in studying human situations because it is manipulative. One could argue that even new paradigm research is manipulative to some extent but it makes provisions for accommodating subjectivity in it's research processes. Further, in scientific inquiry the researchers hold no responsibility for taking actions and, very often, taking action is left for someone else, perhaps a community developer or en extension worker. Moreover, the process alienates the 'subjects from the inquiry process as well as from the product, from others and from themselves (Rowan, 1981). In our view, external bodies who make plans which affects communities, whether it be a research or a community development (CD) project, have a moral responsibility of making a positive contribution towards the betterment of the target community. Communities should not be 'used', (as certain community members perceive outsiders) selfishly by outsiders for the

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advancement of their political, economic or professional opportunities in a manner of "the tiger who comes in a fox's coat" (Graig 1996). Reason (1988) has highlighted the need to consider the question ' Who is this research really for?' as a primary concern in co-operative inquiry. Berman (1981) described that the knowledge gained through objective inquiry as 'dead knowledge' because it is separated from the subjectivity, the very source from which the knowledge is generated.

Action research ascribes to the creation of 'new knowledge' and bringing about improvements to the situation being inquired. Carr and Kemmis (1986) described Action Research as a "form of self reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of (a) their own social and educational practices (b) their understanding of these practices and (c) the situations in which those practices are carried out. It is a cyclic process that continues in a spiral movement and necessitates involvement of those responsible for the practice. Shifting away from the scientific approach, action research embraces experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) which ultimately brings about empowerment to the learner along a flux of life events in an ever changing world. Therefore, the researcher moves forward along the inquiring *situation* and inquiring *process*. Further, it is a dialectical process which allows us to capture dynamics of social systems. Grundy (1982) described it as a 'strategic action' for the goals of improvement which deliver practical outcomes and upholds moral responsibility of delineation.

In appreciation of the existing ambiguity on community development ideologies, focuses, approaches and particularly the democratic freedom of individual to make choices, we were happy to extensively borrow from 'action research' theories (Carr and Kemmis, 1986) and 'co-operative inquiry'(Rowan, 1981) concepts to formulate our research principles.

Principles Underpinning this Research

1. Researcher plays a role of 'critical subjectivity' (Reason and Rowan 1981a, Reason 1988)
2. No 'change' should be forced upon the growers and they should be active participants in the decision making process.
3. Both the researchers and the 'participants' learns from the experience
4. Knowledge take different forms and one form should not be hold more valuable than the other.
5. 'Co-existence' relationship with the participants needs to be maintained and it is the responsibility of the researcher.

These principles left us room for examining the concepts of community participation, learning, issues identification and the role of the researcher or community developer.

In the field.

Accessing market gardeners.

Working in the field poses many challenges to the researcher. We were not immune to this either. The initial challenge was to locate the Indo-Chinese market gardeners in the Sydney basin. There was little demographic data available on the community and attempts to find gate keepers, community leaders or community organisations were a failure as they did not have one. Considering the fact that they produced 'Asian vegetables', we decided to look for Asian vegetable plots rather than for growers. It was an effective strategy and we were able to locate a large number of Asian vegetable farms thinly spread among many other market gardens.

The next challenge was to access the growers. When I first draw into farms, on many occasions, it was evident that the growers had disappeared a moment ago. When I found someone in the vicinity, they did not speak English. If someone who could speak English was present, he was not the farmer

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but a relative or a friend who came to give a helping hand in the farm. Any attempts to continue the conversation was simply cut off pretending that they were busy or had very little English knowledge. He neither knew what time the "farmer would come" or how to contact him. The simple interpretation of events indicated that my presence was not welcome.

Talking a different language.

To make things worse, when I was lucky to find a 'real' farmer soon I realised that the 'language' I was talking was totally foreign to them. My attempts to plant the idea of 'participatory inquiry' into their minds was a utter failure as none of the concepts were fitting into their ways of seeing. The idea of working together to improve their situation was puzzling to them. If one wanted to improve their situation, they had a long list of things that needed to be done. But everything was beyond their capacity or powers. It was not easy to plant the idea of 'learning together'. 'Learning' take place in schools, and universities. Teachers, black boards, books, pens and pencils are the tools. Their children were going to school to learn. They ended up in this farm because they could not learn.

Reason (1988) stated, " If there is an inquiry task around which a group of people can genuinely join to explore, then any problem of initiation, ownership, and power can be resolved through authentic negotiation and confrontation". The biggest problem was that no farmer believed that there was a problem to be investigated. Everyone shared the view that " We are doing our best under our situations. Factors 'out there' are the limiting factors of progress". Further, the growers did not believe in forming a group or association. Every grower was struggling with numerous obstacles of their own and did not have time to think about common problems. "One should be able to stand on his own feet's before he try to address common problems" was the sentiments they expressed with regard to forming an association to address common problems. Entering to a sensible dialogue with the farmers who holds onto different meaning perspectives and values was a challenge. Despite my cultural 'closeness', which was a strong point in our relationship, I realised the difficulty of translating participatory concepts to a community who never had the opportunity to participate. In a similar note, learning, reflection, discourse, and equal status or negotiations were alien to them.

This was no way near a situation where 'forming of action research groups or Co-operative inquiry groups' was possible; let alone agreeing to explore a shared inquiry task. Talking about 'chemical usage' issues stood miles away. The questions I wanted to ask had to wait. Despite numerous set-backs, I was driven by the inner forces of a quest to know 'why do they behave like this and generate explanations for their refusal to accept me. The situation demanded a different communicative approach rather than attempting to simplify abstract concepts in 'participatory development'.

Reflecting on my early encounters with the growers, and having imbibed their 'language', culture and values I decided to make extensive efforts to become identified as a member of the community rather than an outsider. I began to use my old car during field visits instead of the modern university car. Many of the growers had only old cars. I avoided formal greetings on the farm and began to talk about activities they were engaged in at the time. Formal greetings are not

a common feature in their interpersonal communication among close associates or group members. I expressed my astonishment at the hard work they were doing, shared their feelings of disappointment when they said the prices of vegetables are low and living is hard; agreed with them about the harshness of the climate and blame the weather for destroying their Tomato in winter. If there were children around, I would ask how well they all doing in the school and advice them to take

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Footnote: Some of field experiences are written in first person as the building relationships was initiated by Karu.

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more interest in studies while helping the parents. I tried to pass a joke at the right time and showed my eagerness to listen to their stories. As they were all refugees of the Vietnam War and Cambodian War, they had enough heroic stories and close encounters of death to share. No outsider had ever listened to these stories in a true sense of appreciating them. Immigration officials listened to them in order to evaluate and judge authenticity. Charity organisations listened to them with sympathy. But sympathy is disempowering. I was concern with the time and the mood of the situation and was careful not to overstay more than appropriate.

Being remnants of a shattered social system, market gardeners were attempting to bring 'order' and stability to their lives in a new environment. They were aware of the magnitude of obstacles stood on their way. They simply did not have time for 'outsiders'. This is a common barrier which many social researchers are facing when accessing communities. Nonetheless, most human situations allows some space for developing intimate relationships. If the researcher can create this spatial proximity with the community, he/she gains entry as some one caring for them, perhaps as a 'friend'. This is the 'space' I was trying to occupy through the communicative process described above.

In narratology, a respondent uses his 'stock of knowledge' passively or actively during interviews. While the passive respondent use his stock of knowledge as a 'vessels of answers' which contains straight forward answers, the active respondent both construes and calls on what is considered relevant in relation to the matters under consideration in the interview, assembling the information so that it make sense as a response (Prince, 1982). In the 'active' mode, the 'stock of knowledge' is likened to several shifting vessels of answers which are used according to the role or the situated identity of the respondent. According to Prince, this stock of knowledge further 'emerges' during the interview as the respondent considers how he/she might answer the question from the point of view of the position she/he holds. In the light of this explanations, I was actively responding in a sensible way during my interactions with the growers for developing an intimate relationship and constructing new knowledge about the community.

Image building.

Growers began to see me as a non threatening person but occasionally questioned the purpose of my visit. I presented my 'student' role rather than the researcher's role but emphasised my desire to learn about their day to day life.

The exploration began in a such a way and for about eight months I was on a mission of image building. The image I represented was that of an 'Asian postgraduate student who is keen to know about people like us'. Based on the cultural awareness I had about Asians communities, I assumed that my appearance would reduce the foreignness to a great deal and affiliation to a university would wither away any suspicions affixed to government officials. They were feeling more relaxed and comfortable to talk about 'us' issues and 'them issues' in their limited vocabulary. Very often some found it hard to complete a full sentence. Guessing from their gestures and attempting to read their minds, I would give them the 'word' they were looking for. I did not attempt to judge their literacy level on such occasions but appreciated the growers willingness to stretch their topics of conversations. We were talking about relatives living overseas, immigration matters, local markets, religion, wife, children, subsidies given to farmers in USA and France, Parent & Teacher meetings in the school, unemployment, various forms of discriminations, tomato, snowpeas and the Department of Agriculture. Through those conversations I was constructing 'their' world and how they view the world around them. One of the guide-lines disciplining my behaviour was 'not to challenge their views or introduce attractive propositions as a substitute.

Now I was seeing the market gardening by this community as a survival strategy more than a strategy for economic independence. It drew my attention to 'survival issues' of the community leaving 'Chemical issues' even further behind. Visits by the Tax man, land leases, the cost of production,

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marketing, crop losses, access to technical information and their reliability, and social security allowances emerged as priority issues. These issues emerged during numerous *informal chats* with individual farmers and articulated by me for recording purposes. Organised group discussions were not possible as there were no organised groups. On the other hand, they did not attempt to generalise problems and neither did they framed them as 'issues' as expert outsiders do. Simply it was not their 'language'.

To make a long story short, I will note only few major events that occurred, though every minor event had a significant importance to the research. On learning about the Tax man's visit, we contacted the taxation office and informed them of our concerns about the tension they were creating among the growers. To our satisfaction, they agreed to rethink their approach. Other issues that the growers wanted to resolve quickly were complex in nature and linked to politics, social policies, bureaucracy, organisational policies and national monetary provisions. I attempted to make them realise that those problems are common to most of the growers and the need for a common approach. This was done during informal chats and they came up with the idea of forming an association. As a result, a properly constituted association was formed and I was elected as the chief investigator with 'powers' to investigate any act of malpractices reported by a member and take disciplinary action against the official concern. Growers were greatly concerned about their constraints to own land and wanted me to represent their case to various Members of Parliament which I happily obliged. When a 'vegetable levy' was introduced by the Federal Government, the growers were very unhappy. I made this opportunity to introduce Cambodian market gardeners to other long established farmer groups who were opposing to it. This gave them the opportunity of getting to know other farmer groups and break the social isolation. Most significantly, as a result of a paper submitted to the State Government of New South Wales by the authors on the issues of growers the Premier appointed a Task Force to study and report on the matter. Growers actively represented their concerns to the Task Force.

As the time passed by, they were maturing as a farmer group and were becoming more aware of the things happening in the world around them. Now we can talk about chemical safety issues, environmental issues, education and training issues and even inviting regulatory officials to give informative talks. Most of the agencies who had an interest on working with Ethnic communities are now in a position to contact the growers without resistance and the growers have the strength to face them. Growers are not only willing to listen but also want their voice to be heard. In accordance with the commitment to project objectives we have developed an appropriate program to educate the growers on aspects of safe use of chemicals along with other relevant information. Community participation in this program remain very high compared to number of other programs that we have observed.

Making Sense.

Our experience with ethnic market gardeners has raised a number of points that needs detailed explanations. Even though, it is unjustifiable to extract specific points from a complex and dynamic situation, we are compelled to do so for the purpose of this paper. Firstly, it is important to examine the initial resistance displayed by growers against the researcher. Secondly, the 'Chemical Usage' issue had to be put off for sometime before any discussion on the subject became appropriate. Third point is the interest developed by the growers to work closely with the researcher in addressing *their* issues. Most importantly the researchers are in a position to distance themselves from the 'situation' leaving a feeling of 'good will' among the growers despite *'our'* failures in addressing *'their'* urgent issues.

Avoidance of Outsiders.

Disappearances under the cover of crops, "me no speak English" responses, "I am not the farmer" replies, "Mine is a small farm. I just started it and I have no much experience" and numerous bodily

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movement indications were all aimed at discouraging my visits. The resistance displayed in a such a manner had two elementary messages for me. First is a 'rejection' of my presence in their surroundings for the fear of 'bringing them to light' from their social "hiding place." They found comfort in an environment where outside interventions were minimal so that they can get along with their day to day business without taking the trouble to fitting into the others world. Even though most of them did not have major encounters with regulatory personal, there was a general uneasiness among them about the possible threats posed by such elements. They had a instinct for the 'demands' made by the government authorities and the wider Australian society for maintaining certain standards, not only for their produces and practices but also for their living conditions. Compliance with such demands had a social, financial and a moral cost that they could not afford. Moreover, there was hardly any institutional support or a political climate that promoted their participation in this social process. Therefore, marginalisation from the "main stream" Australia and particularly from the public service providers was a self initiated, carefully manipulated survival process adopted by the Asian vegetable growers. Theoretically, building communities along the line of ethnic solidarity can be viewed as ethnic pluralism in a society where multiculturalism is an important social policy.

When I became an 'accepted' visitor to their communities some of the growers revealed to me a strategy they used to avoid 'unwanted outsiders' in their farms. Soon after the outsider left his farm, he would ring neighbouring farms and warned them to be watchful of the possible arrival of the 'suspicious visitor'. Soon the news would spread among the whole farming community. This explained the reasons for the sudden disappearances evident during my early farm visits. They were suspicious of outsiders for number of reasons. Firstly, they did not want to be seen doing the 'wrong' thing in the eyes of an outsider. It does not necessarily imply that they were using wrong practices but not knowing whether what they do is right or wrong. One farmer put this unfamiliarity in the new environment as "a blind person changing his place of residence'. Inability to see creates enough problem for a blind person, but he can survive in a *familiar* setting. If he had to change places, things become far more worse. This metaphorical explanation depicted the whole life of the ethnic market gardeners.

We were able to make sense of the community by listening to their stories. As refugees they had left their familiar surroundings along with their social identities, peasant livelihood and freedom of choice enjoyed within their small communities. They *lost* all that on the day they decided to 'escape' from the social and political commotions in their home country. Collecting as much as food for survival during the journey to unknown destinations, they said 'good by' to their 'world'. As one farmer described:

"We (his family) only hoped to get to the camp in the Thailand boarder which we heard of but never knew how to make it. In a dark night silently, me and my wife with the four kids started the long walk behind other people who also was fleeing the country. Being careful not to make any noise for the fear of being heard by the armed groups we slowly walk through the forest among thousands of similar families. The journey was slow as I had to carry a heavy load of foods and clothing for the family. I asked my wife to take the kids and follow a group who were going in front of us. She took as much as food she can carry and went ahead leaving me. It took a few days before I ran out of food and carrying a heavy load was not possible. I left everything behind except some clothes for the wife and children to were when I meet them in the camp and walked for six months."

All the stories are marked by similar themes of loss, courage, hope and survival strategies adopted by these refugee communities. Ability to cope up with losses and the commitments to re-claim what they lost has driven them in re-building their families and communities. Re-building families constitutes keeping the family intact, re-establishing the order in the family, re-constructing patriarchal authority, and rebuilding social identity. By the time we commenced our study, more than 75% of the growers had their own houses. Children were going to schools or universities and wives were working in farms along with their husbands. As such, they have managed to satisfy their very basic needs to a certain level under difficult conditions. This was a tremendous achievement for them in a short time in a totally different, often hostile environment considering their limited collateral and skills available

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to them. There was no way that they wanted to risk this hard won 'sense of life' by allowing strangers into their community.

Explaining avoidance

From the above discussion, we can generate three tacit behaviours demonstrated by the Cambodian community. Firstly, they recognised the Australian society as something foreign to them and found difficulty in adopting to it. The balance between the possibility of adaptation to the new environment (a mental construction based on experiences) and avoidance of it stood in favour of negativity. This phenomenon needs to be explored holistically as the conflict was originating from the whole system rather than from different parts.

Considering the market gardening community as a social system, what shapes their behaviour has to be understood in the context of the social dynamics of the system. A system represents a whole and "whole' is a field of energy marked by a definable or indefinable boundary, in which the activities of it's elements are functionally interrelated. The wholeness of this whole arises from the coexistence of states of *multiplicity* and *unity (*Rudhyar, 1986). Market gardening was the major activity that maintained a functional relationship between individual growers in the 'whole' of Cambodian farming community. The whole community was circumscribed by ethnicity, language and social class (marked by refugee status, low resources and low income) which characterised the 'unity' of the whole. However, the multiplicity and the unity do not remain static and bring rigour to the whole. It is the most common observation made of living systems that they under go change and the change is a continues phenomenon. The forces of change may results in altering the interactions between the elements of the system and even it's relationships with other systems. Moreover, change is a relatively stable interplay of moving factors and patterns or relationships which often undergo a rapid or slow series of transformations (Rudhyar,1986). He further suggests that motion is rhythmic and therefore it is cyclic and repetitive. This motion has a kind of order and a *structure* in a very abstract sense. Human beings comes into *realisation* this structure when they recurrently experience certain events of life. More strong experiences are likely to remembered and the weaker experiences are subdued. Therefore, if the system develop sensitivity to the recurrent phenomenon it is likely to alter the process of change so that unpleasurable occurrences are avoided.

In the light of the above explanation, it is reasonable to believe the refusal of ethnic market gardeners to accept outsiders was caused from the feeling of insecurity created among them from their past experiences. There was enough evidence to support that a major part of their lives had been under the authority of 'outsiders' and they had to submit to the power of outsiders in order to survive through the uncertainty created from the time of fleeing their country. First the authorities of the Pol Pot regime, then the Vietnamese Army, next the management in refugee camps, next the immigration officers of different countries, and finally numerous government agencies and private organisations in Australia were directly impacting on their lives. These external forces (the power of outsiders) not only uprooted them from their traditional peasant life style but also pushed them to a totally new social system. In the new society they perceived themselves as being negatively stereotyped. In the work place they were seen as hard workers but with no 'brain'. At the supermarket, shop assistants were watching them as thieves. At the Department of Social Security they were seen as a menace. News media daily reported about gangsters, crimes and drugs associated with Asians. When one of the grower took his first produce to the Flemington markets, he was abused using racial remarks. As one grower put it "We came to the land because the river was full of crocodiles. But the land is full of wolfs".

The feeling of insecurity was largely due to the *realisation* of their limitations in facing the challenges posed by the new environment. This realisation came from a sensual referencing process rather than a critical analysis of events. Avoidance of unpleasurable experience emerged as a strategy of modifying the change and they intuitively opted to reduce encounters with outsiders. For instance,

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one grower who was keen on his child's education once went to a Parent and Teacher meeting of the school. He hardly understood anything they discussed and it was humiliating to sit and watch others and not being able to actively contribute. That was the only time he attended such a meeting for last 5 years. Such behaviours succinctly displays the manner in which they manifest behaviours to avoid unpleasurable experiences.

Therefore, it can be argued that the Cambodian community has established a set of new norms, to maintain a social distance from the main stream Australian community and particularly from the government agencies due to the feeling of insecurity, and realisation of their limitations to effectively work with them. A Cambodian research student who made number of visits to the community stated that she was surprised by the suspicious attitude of the growers towards outsiders in compared to friendly nature of general Cambodian villagers.

Putting our agenda behind.

The second conflict in the research is related to the process of 'making sense' by different systems. As mentioned before, we assumed that 'chemical usage' by the growers was an issue that needed attention. It was one among a number of issues that emerged from our previous study but soon we realised the difficulty of sharing this idea with the growers. Difficulty of sharing ideas are commonly viewed as a communication problem but in this case it was an inconsistency arising from "sense making" processes. Further, we propose that the "sense making" process is influenced by the cultural and intellectual make up of the system.

An attempt to talk about the production practices of the growers by an outsider, from a different perspective, is an admittance of inadequacies of their current practice. At this point, as stated earlier, the 'image' of the outsider becomes important. If the outsider portrays an image of one above the level of the growers, it is highly probable to create this negative feeling. This is a very sensitive and very important point to be considered when dealing with human issues. Reason (1988) warns about the possible difficulties for negotiation that may arise from power or status differences of the project initiator and the potential group members. Introducing myself as a student gave me space to move around and some flexibility to change my image as the need arise. We realised that achieving this *flexibility* is very important during the early stages of the research as any long term social interaction is a dynamic process. On the contrary, 'static' images could deteriorate along the course of research particularly if the group members develop a 'false' sense power. If this happens, the project initiator has to assume a subordinate position and the project orientation would be lost.

Another important point contributed to putting off the issue of chemical usage was that it was not an issue for them. They thought it may well be a concern for others. When growers were asked if they are aware of the environmental pollution that chemicals may cause. The growers answered "Think about the amount of motor car emissions in Sydney. How can one compare small spill of farm chemicals to the magnitude the other?" Every grower was of the opinion that "farm chemicals are needed, no crops can be grown without their use". On the other hand, they had urgent issues that caused great concerns to them. Land tenancy, low prices, Tax mans visits to farms, councils regulations and high cost of production were the problems they faced.

In the case of ethnic market gardeners, even after establishing initial relationships, negotiating the issue of 'chemical usage' for further exploration was not possible. The issue of chemical usage covers a wide range of areas such as using a registered chemical, proper dose, container disposal, transport and storage, safe handling, protective clothing, withdrawal periods, and environmental considerations. Culturally, they have never engaged in such discussions, discussions that re-examined their own practices. For one reason, they believed that what they doing is the 'best' they can do under the prevailing circumstances and even though there may be more technically sound options available it doesn't suit their conditions. Growers clearly demonstrated this reluctance on many occasions during

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my informal chats for no reason other than the strong belief held in their own practices. The other side of the coin was that, accepting inadequacies in their practices is an open acknowledgment of their incompetence. This was against their preferred social conduct and no one wanted to be seen 'naked' in the eyes of other growers. Therefore, making grounds for establishing 'co-learner' relationship which encompasses communicative and reflective learning described in action research theories was hard to achieve due to cultural factors and the cognitive development stages of the community.

The growers learned from their day to day experiences. They interpreted their experience in a way that suited to their individual situation. Actions towards things were based on the meanings that the things had for them. One grower wanted to construct a large 'shade house' in the farm at a time he was hard hit by financial difficulties for his "sick wife to work in the shade". For him, aspects of 'comfort' was the dominant thought behind this action rather than providing a better environment for the crop and an economic gain. One of the commonest meaning many growers assigned to agro-chemicals was the 'medicinal qualities' of the product rather than their hazardous concerns. Many growers were using the term 'medicine' in general for agro-chemicals and it took a while for me to make sense of their reasoning. When applying the 'medicine' concept to human situations, medicine has a curable quality. Based on the same argument, chemicals are used by the growers to cure their 'sick' crops. Not surprisingly, they used the term 'sick' to both the human and plants alike. They had sick tomato plants and sick children. They both needed medicine.

In a similar note, we could not even generate a discussion on 'risk' of farm chemicals. Basically, their perception of 'risk' had very little relevance to farm chemicals. Socially constructed meaning of risk to a grower was the degree of danger it posed to one's life. With no knowledge on human physiology or chemistry of pesticides or even incidents of farm chemical related accidents, the growers believed that farm chemicals did not pose a threat to their lives. "It is hazardous if someone drinks it" they referred to suicide cases. "We come from tropical countries and our body is strong" . Particularly, considering their life experiences it is reasonable for them to place farm chemicals at the end of hazardous list. Therefore, as far as any particular individual is concerned, the nature of things consists of the meaning that individual gives to it (Mezirow, 1991). This not to suggest that the growers were fully ignorant of the dangers of chemicals but they had a 'soft' attitude to it.

Another dimension of their meaning construction process was the importance placed on the 'person'. Peoples' orientation to persons and objects has been the focus of number of studies. Krywaniuk and Das (1976) stated that Navajo children in the Los Angelese area displayed a tendency towards object orientation. Krueger (1973) suggested that Indians of the Pima tribes were highly person oriented. Cultural characteristics of peoples' orientation is a significant factor that effects constructive communication. Cambodian farmers usually put the importance of the 'person' in the first place and represent a person oriented culture. Culturally, the religion is the most reverend thing in their life and next comes the parents. Growers clearly added more weight to the person when interpreting an experience. If the intention of the 'person' has been seen in a positive light, the outcome of the experience did not bother them too much even if it delivered negative results. Once a grower decided to buy a particular kind of seeds from a new supplier who developed a good relationship with him. The seeds did not grow properly for any apparent deficiency from the grower's part but the big loss did not make a dent in his friendship. Rather, he further sought his advice and relied on him.

In a similar note, during interpersonal communication "what's being said" has a greater bearing on 'who' said it for Cambodian market gardeners. For them, the massages does not exists without an author. For instance, in the absence of a reliable information system growers had to turn to other growers, agents or chemical retailers for advice on certain matters. However, the validity of the advice measured on the basis of the strength of the relationship existed between them. In other words, the person to person relationship is one of the strong social trait demonstrated by the community. Building such a relationship between us and the growers was not possible for quite some time and any serious discussion on chemical usage had to be postponed until such time.

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Seeking outsider assistants.

Having undergone through initially a very critical period of interactions, finally we were able to establish a relationship that warranted a critical dialogue with the growers at individual levels. Now, we were in a position to talk about matters of common interest as well as sensitive personal issues. They shared with us some of the 'secrets of the trade' usually kept to themselves. They would not hesitate to ask for help or disagree with us on certain points. I would be invited to their social gatherings and important family functions. Most importantly, my presence do not alter their natural behaviours. Some of the growers who had a hostile attitude towards me at the beginning needed my help to convince a point to fellow growers. "Karu has given us a voice", "We can sleep without fear because of Karu", or "He knows everything about us. Ask Karu" are some of the comments they made about me in certain occasions. One of the main task I had to perform during the whole period of research has been to represent them at various occasions and prepare appropriate documents to suit their needs.

Talking about chemical usages is not a difficult task at present. They do not see that as a culture of blame (Fox, 1997). It is the goodwill, friendship, respect and social acceptance that brought us together. Growers have found time to attend an education program designed for them. Discussions are centred around chemical usage taxation, government regulations and even forming co-operatives, the very ideas that were vehemently resisted at the beginning of the research.

Conceptualisation

This case has provided us with immense materials for reflection. Again, as mentioned before, selecting a few points out of a very complex experience could contribute to reductionism, but we have to acknowledge the limitations of our linguistic expressions. While the richness of human experience can be fully comprehend only by the participants, communicative constraints, in a positive sense, keeps the unexplored world open for future inquirers.

One's freedom to make choices is seen as a fundamental human right in modern democracy. In the case of ethnic market gardeners, what we have seen is the execution of such powers by two different communities, namely the market gardeners themselves and the professional community as represented by us. The experience has been marked by 'outsider avoidance 'outsider acceptance' and 'participatory actions'. Factors affecting first and second points has been attributed to ethno specific social norms and feeling of insecurity. Triandis and Triandis (1962) has stated: conformity to group norms, cognitive dissonance and insecurity as determinants of social distance between groups. Our reflections suggests that the major conflict we encountered with the market gardeners was fundamentally a cognitive dissonance between two systems; that of the professionals and the 'subjects'.

Professional culture.

Professional culture has developed over the last two hundreds years on the basis of Western education. Western thinking was largely dominated by the ability to establish scientific validity for explaining natural phenomena. They look for precision, repetitiveness, and predictability. As Flood and Carson (1988) has noted, much of the agreements shared in the Western society is based on scientific reasoning and it is the result of the scientist's mode of education. This mode of education trains the scientists to look for agreement and seek an 'objective' account of nature and construct reality. Therefore, " the scientific approach is clearly functionalist, that is, it is associated with realist ontology and positivist epistemology..." (Flood and Carson, 1988).

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That is, reality is external to the individual imposing themselves on individual consciousness; it is a given 'out there' and is of an objective nature. The knowledge is based on hard facts, it is real and can be transmitted in a tangible form. Therefore, the reality can exist independent of the individual being and has a universal acceptance.

The 'reality' thus created through critical analysis and intellectual developments becomes the most shared and verbalised experience. Verbalisation itself is a creation of a new language and often full of words that are not familiar to the average person. Through this communicative process they try to come to common agreements on the 'nature of things' and introduce as 'concepts'. Kuhn (1975) indicated, agreement is indeed a cultural phenomenon. Grown up in this culture, the professionals tend to ignore the 'self' but attempts to 'order' things according to their visions of reality and pass these techniques to future professionals. This behaviour is not limited only to one group of professionals who embraces reductionism but also abundantly displayed by those who subscribe to holism.

The world created through this process can be identified as a "formal system' described by Rosen (1985). According to him *"formal systems .....are entirely creations of the mind and can be seen as self generating networks of interdependent abstract concepts"*. We would propose the definition of formal systems as an illustration of the professional culture which is manifested by abstract concepts. It is characterised by their system of knowledge, ideology, values, language and day to day rituals. Simply, they are higher achievers of knowledge and have a belief system that supports their own intellectual superiority. Very often, professionals generate 'visionary goals' for 'not so knowledgeable communities'. Even the professionals promoting 'participatory research' holds on to such values. Grundy's (1982) interpretation of Action Research is a good example for this. She described action research as a 'strategic action for the goals of improvements which implies the notion that the 'vision of improved situation' was born in the mind of the knowledgeable professional. Further, they subscribe to ideologies which they aligned and continually refine it. They create new words and interpret old words in newer ways. The world is increasingly flooded with term such as 'win win situations' 'politically correct' "realising maximum potentials and 'economic rationalism'. Such developments can be observed in every discipline. This is the 'acquired professional culture' that alienates professionals from the common citizens.

Professional illusions.

According to Avery, Baker and Kane (1984) "An illusion occurs when our sensory experience does not correspond with our findings when we measure the object giving rise to that experience". In the professional culture, it is apparent that the reality making is a conceptual discrimination process rather than a sensory registration. In the case of ethnic market gardeners, we were in contact with a large number of professionals who had an interest on this community. They behaved on the assumption that market gardening is a 'small business' and accordingly, profit making, record keeping, and taxation were seen as major concerns. They saw, the language barrier as the major obstacle to communicate with them and even explored the possibility of translating their publications into ethnic languages. However, it was proven, as described earlier, that their image of market gardeners was a misrepresentation of reality.

Another illusory aspect of science and technology has been raised by Hustedde (1996). He argues that presenting science and technology as rational and value-free is an illusion and some scientists view citizens as Ignorant. Yet, many professionals who believes that they have all the information , find it hard to modify or re-create specific information to suit the individual needs of the community members in some situations. The danger of such illusions with regard to CD practice is the reluctance on the part of the practitioner to acknowledge it's existence.

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During our research, we came a cross number of agricultural and policy planing professionals who believed that the ethnic market gardeners brought their bad practices of chemical usage from their countries of birth. This was not true for three reasons. First, majority of them were not farmers back in home. Secondly, even the few people who did farming back in home worked on rice fields which has no relevance to market gardening. Thirdly, they hardly used chemicals in their fields as they were unaffordable. However, these facts were not well received by the 'professionals' because they did not match with their perceptual patterns. Similar perceptions were evident on issues such as 'language barrier', 'chemical labelling and information delivery strategies.

World of the market gardeners.

Average man makes sense of the world using all sensory organs. They hear, see, and make judgement on encounters. Mind has only a limited role to play in this process as the information received is not necessarily critically analysed. Knowledge is a combination of intuition, tenacity, and authority for them and people make judgments in terms of feelings. According to Luciano and Raulin (1997), "In essence they assert that we know this is true because (1) it has always been so, (2) we feel it is so, or (3) the authority says it is so."

The culture of market gardeners is characterised by this mode of learning. They wanted to see things unfolding. 'Things' are associated with the person and he lives in the experience. Therefore the learning is a very personal process unlike the notion of learning embedded in professional culture. They are more likely to make uncritical decisions and driven by immediate needs. Reasoning is not based only on 'hard facts' but emerges as a holistic response to the experience. It is holistic because the response was based on intuition, and shaped by cultural manifestation and personal validity. They paid little attention to the causes and probable consequences of certain experiences. They apprehend reality through sensitivities. Seeing, hearing, taste, touch and feeling joins with thoughts in the meaning making process. Once, a grower expressed his strong desire to go back to his country of birth and help a family living in a street after seeing a documentary film on such groups. By 'help' he meant living with them and joining in their struggle for one month. The decision is partly an emotional one but emotions are part of human nature.

A good example for making sense by seeing comes from the popular Indo-Chinese phrase "Seeing is believing" Growers adopted this concept at the very basic colloquial level in their farming practices. For instance, when they were spraying crops they looked for two 'visible' evidence as to its effectiveness. That is, to see if the plants are wet and the insects are dead. When spraying, they "made sure to give a good shower" and wanted to see excess chemicals drain from leaf tips. A correct size droplet in the range of 100- 200 micron can not be seen without keen observation. Keen observation is time consuming and after all if tiny droplets are effective enough, larger volumes should kill pests quicker. They like to see them die as soon as they spray and therefore, some tend to increase the dose to get better results. This is obviously against the basic principles of chemical control of pests but we have to acknowledge the validity of the practice against the capacities of the growers. Here we refer to the capacity of the mind to process information and transform them to realities.

Shade (1984) suggests that the information processing system used by each individual is culturally unique. *"The major variation in this processing of information which seems to produce individual differences occurs in the sensory registration and conceptual discrimination process where culture is most influential."* According to Combs and Snygg (1959), individuals place their own particular meaning on the information received creating their own phenomenal world. So the world thus created by the market gardeners was a result of both the sensory registrations and culturally influenced conceptual discrimination processes.

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Objective Entity.

From the above discussion, we can draw a theoretical framework useful for CD practitioners. As discussed before, the uneasiness arising in community development approaches is largely a conflict of two cognitive systems rather than a methodological inadequacy. While the dominant culture of professionals has been developed in the line of the search for external reality, it creates an objective entity. In other words, reality is created by re-defining natural phenomena in a process through which seeing, separating and objectifying. This is driven by the urge to be analytical, critical, interpretive and creative. In CD practice, this process has a mechanistic metaphor unlike aesthetic dimensions apparent in Art.

Objective entity dimension is clearly evident in CD as it maintains two roles; that of the 'actor' and the 'subjects'. According to Batten (1975), the actor "thinks, decides, plans, organises, administers and provides for people". Harry Trumen, the US President, in 1949 declared his intention of embarking on projects for making the benefits of scientific advances made in USA for the improvement of underdeveloped areas of the world. This notion of 'shaping the world according to our image' has not faded away even at the end of the 20th century. When the Scientists, Economists, Sociologists and other professionals construct 'ideal situations' in their respective disciplines, it is a 'professional exercise' which has to be theoretically sound and satisfy the funding bodies. During this process, the individual 'self" submits to the professional culture.

Accommodating diversity.

Reflecting on past experiences or making long term plans were not concepts that made sense to market gardeners. When asked them to think of their first year of market gardening and name two crops they have grown, many replied "Snowpeas and Cherry Tomato". "Can you give me two reasons for growing them?" Nobody replied. "Can you think of two practices that you have changed over the last three years" was a much harder question to answer. Later, a grower advised me " Karu, if you want them to answer, ask them direct questions. If you ask them to tell the colours of the chairs in this room, they will never say it. But if you ask 'Is this chair Green? he would say "Yes" or "No". As such, reflecting on experiences and formulating learning from them was not practicable with growers.

Therefore, engaging in a critical dialogue with the growers was an unrealistic proposition. As we have observed in many situations, professionals who put on the "coat of Facilitators" attempt in vain to 'stimulate' people to participate in group discussions. They use an ice-breaking technique or a similar strategy and expect the members to be active participants. However, the basic objectives of Action Research theory can not be realised in situations where two different conceptual schemes exists between the researcher and the community. It acts as a barrier for learning as there is no communicative bridge. The communicative dimension relates to the lack of an appropriate language. The 'language' created by professionals often does not make sense to the community while the language of the community is confusing to the professionals. This situation demands a way out of this dilemma. Educating communities to a level of the ontological position of the professional is not an attractive proposition. Attempts to revisit the forgotten 'self' while maturing through a professional career is not an alternative either, as the illusions of 'professional' culture discourage such attempts.

Building Personal relationships

The challenge is then "How can we avoid this confrontation and create conditions for participation?" Our answer to this lies in the area of building personal relationships. Viewing two entities as different systems which maintains relationships between unity and multiplicity within their own boundaries, we can depart from the 'us' and 'them' considerations as a starting point. Because, each system in it's own right acts as an 'environment for the other. When brought closer, the behaviour of one system can

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trigger changes in the other. As such, the environment does not determine the state of changes of the system but only stimulates. We can use this analogy for describing our roles as researchers in the ethnic market gardeners case.

After sensing the initial resistance displayed by the market gardeners, we realised the need to change our behaviour. As they easily related to visual and audio sensations, our physical appearance and the language became the primary source of triggering. On realising the 'lack of language', we decided to listen to them rather than talking. This strategy had a dual effect on our relationship. In a way, it saved us from using a 'wrong' language ' and getting into possible unintended troubles. On the other hand, it gave us the opportunity to be familiarise ourselves with it. For the growers, it was an opportunity to establish some identity for the community by letting 'others' know who they are. Thus, the behaviour of the researchers generated mutual benefits to both the parties.

Conversations do not continues between groups or individuals unless appropriate conditions are created. When we learned that the market gardening is a survival strategy for ethnic migrant families, we developed a sense of their commitment to the family and its importance to their survival. So, the survival of the family provided us a context for interactions and conversations. Yet, to make 'family' a reality for the growers, it has to be seen as a real thing. When I started to take my wife or children with me during my farm visits, it made them very comfortable to relate to me as another 'person' rather than an 'outsider'. Thus the 'person' to person relationship began.

This relationship continued to build up gradually through a slow process of changing the growers attitude towards us. The 'suspicious outsider' became a 'person' and the person became a close companion. Then, they began to invite us to their private and social functions and accepted us as friends. While it is hard to make clear distinctions between these 'status', the important point to note is that through building personal relationships, we have been able to create a condition for 'participation'. 'Participation' in this context can be defined as a condition where individuals felt free of all kind of mental or physical constraints which are imposed by them or by the 'environment' and making consensual agreements using their free will'.

The relationship was very dynamic and each event informed the next action. Personal relationships implies a notion of care, mutual respect, appreciation, accountability and responsibility. It is not operating on abstract concepts but at social level where one can share pain and happiness of the other. In a compassionate manner, it shares losses and gains. Very often, using critical analysis was not possible as the changes in social situations occur very fast. Therefore, intuition plays a major role in human situations as every single experience can not be considered in a 'concrete' sense. In this context, it can be argued that, in social situations, intuition is an essential part of making sense while the 'critical analysis' helps abstracting concepts. In participatory process, a balance between the two has to be maintained and the personal relationships provides a medium for it and acts as a catalyst..

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